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Beauty occur, we must say that these whole states (on account of the presence of Personal Affection and Contemplation of Beauty, and irrespective of what their other constituents may be), are always good—*i. e.*, the *concrete states* are good as Wholes. But in (1) we do *not* take actual unabridged concrete cases, whereas this is what Mr. Moore sometimes seems to insist upon as a requirement of method (see “*Principia Ethica*,” § 55). It may be observed that to *do* this—to take actual concrete states as wholes—would apparently make even an extensive definition” of The Good out of the question—it would surely reduce us to that hopelessly unsystematic ethical view which Professor Sidgwick calls Perceptual Intuitionism. In (2) we *do* adopt this procedure; but as Mr. Moore will not allow it to be done in the case of *e. g.*, Pleasant Consciousness, inconsistency of method seems again to be the result.

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LITERATURE AND THE MORAL CODE.

“Vérité en dèçà des Pyrénées, erreur au delà.”—*Pascal*.

Within the past few months one or two English authors have put on the stage plays which have been attacked for the freedom which they allowed themselves in discussing moral problems. This is unusual, for it is generally French writers who arouse criticism on that score. The stir created by these plays in Anglo-Saxon countries makes it appear timely to discuss the respective attitudes of Anglo-Saxon and of Latin races in such matters.

No attempt will be made in the present paper to show that one side is right and the other wrong; nor is it intended to offer a compromise. On the contrary, the purpose of this article is to show that the two standpoints are not reducible to the same terms, to show why they are bound to clash and why there can be no reconciliation. An attempt will be made to make the problem thus presented better understood.

First of all we must make a clear distinction between the two attitudes—the attitude of literature toward morality, and another which can by no means be identified with it, although one must admit that there is some connection between the two. Some writers maintain that art has its aim in itself; it is the theory of art for the sake of art, which is a distinctly Latin ideal. Others, the great majority of Anglo-Saxon writers, maintain that art must be only a means to an end. One ideal is purely æsthetic, the other purely didactic.

But it would be a mistake to infer that Latin writers ignore moral problems, and that art for the sake of art is their only ideal. It would be decidedly erroneous to believe that this is the most common attitude among French artists. All sorts of practical problems are treated as they are in Anglo-Saxon countries, but the difference lies in the way they are approached. The respective positions can be described about as follows: The Anglo-Saxons say that literature must be kept within the limits of the ethical laws that govern us, must insist upon the beauty of those laws, and encourage their observance by the public. The Latins say that literature has no such obligation in treating moral problems.

Let us first examine the Anglo-Saxon standpoint. Eliminating all rhetoric from the discussion, the argument may be summed up as follows: Society rests upon certain moral and social principles which assure order; to suggest doubts as to the excellence of those principles means to shake society to its foundations, to breed disorder and anarchy. The very fact that some persons, thanks to special gifts of nature, hold a position of leadership, places upon them increased responsibilities. Authors, therefore, ought not to discuss problems of ethics in such a fashion as to mislead the public. This attitude is perfectly reasonable, but at the same time there are some consequences which must be recognized.

It implies, first, that no art must be cultivated except that which is accessible to the masses and suited to their intelligence. It should be remembered that the problem of freedom of thought in the treatment of moral questions is a comparatively modern one in art and literature. There was a time

when books were not accessible to all as they are to-day. Instruction was the privilege of a few and literature was confined to the educated classes. From the present moral point of view, the literatures of past centuries were much freer than ours. Of course no one in our day would be likely to suffer imprisonment or torture or death for expressing ideas disapproved by political or ecclesiastical authorities; but the restriction now imposed by moral obligations, by what is called "public opinion," is in fact even greater than the physical coercion of past centuries. We are not concerned here with the question whether the present standpoint is better or worse than the old. But that democracy is responsible for the limitation of freedom of speech and thought that hampers modern authors is certain. This is recognized by some of those who have come forward lately protesting against liberty in literature. The writer recently attended a large meeting of one of the important literary clubs in this country, where the chief speaker, a well-known professor of ethics, said that if no protest is made against the too free treatment of certain questions in novels or on the stage, our democracy will be seriously threatened.

The attempt to restrict moral discussion has another *consequence*. It is an assumption that our present moral code is final. Now, in the progress of centuries, as every one knows, ethical standards have changed. Our modern conception of marriage, our duties toward children, our moral attitude toward inferior races, and so forth, have undergone complete transformation. On what ground, then, can we claim to have reached the definitive truth in those matters? Certainly not on the ground that the practical results are ideal. Let us take the country where modern principles have been allowed most freedom to develop unhampered by traditions—America. As the outgrowth of our conception of marriage we have the fact that the world over America is called the "land of divorce;" as the outgrowth of our conception of civil freedom we have "bossism." To accept as permanent a social system which yields such results would not be encouraging.¹

¹ One might answer that these are not *necessary* results of modern conceptions. This is perhaps true; but then, let other social systems have the

We allow liberty of thought in philosophical, in economic, and in scientific problems, to a certain extent in religious problems—why this exception in the case of moral problems? What if the idea of the sacredness of the moral code then in existence, had been successfully enforced in the time of Socrates, Buddha, Christ, Luther, Wesley, even of Emerson? The moralists who would forbid a perfectly free discussion of such topics as Mr. Bernard Shaw's plays deal with are concerned first of all with the welfare of modern democracy. They do not discuss literary art; they merely aim to defend democracy against a too free art.

Our conclusion is this: The Anglo-Saxon point of view is *right* in that it takes into consideration our modern social ideals, and *wrong* in that it does not take art into consideration. The problem is not solved; one of its elements is simply denied recognition.

We need not explain at length the Latin point of view, since it is exactly the reverse of the Anglo-Saxon. The French seems to care nothing, or very little, about the immediate consequences of theories expressed in works of art which are within reach of the general public. They act as if the mediocre-minded masses did not exist at all, or as if they ought to be at least wise enough to leave alone what they cannot understand. Therefore, if an author has some valuable idea to propose, whatever it may be, he expresses it regardless of consequences, the result being that it may do a great deal of harm; for some will twist ideas, or quote an author to justify their greed, their lust, their passions.

While the Anglo-Saxon point of view, as we have seen, safeguards public morality at the expense of freedom of art and of thought, the French point of view *vice versa*, safeguards freedom of thought, sometimes at the expense of public morality.

When once this truth has been fully grasped with its logi-

benefit of this argument. The cruelty of masters, for instance, is not a necessary result of slavery; in fact everybody agrees that many slave-owners were excellent masters. Yet even though they were all good masters, no one would be in favor of slavery again. The same holds good in other cases.

cal consequences in practical life, the contention made in our introductory remarks can hardly be denied, namely, that the two points of view are irreducible, at least as long as the supporters of either remain consistent; for, either you take the ground that views which are socially dangerous should be suppressed, or you recognize the rights of free thought as more important than any moral harm which may result from the expression of such views. In the former case you necessarily limit the freedom of literature, in the latter you disregard the welfare of modern democracy.

But why is it so? How is it that two countries should adopt such widely different attitudes in their conception of art?

The kind of literature produced will depend greatly, as we have seen, upon what the reading public want; and where there are wide contrasts in culture, education and social conditions, the public must be different. It is futile to criticize authors from an abstract point of view; their works should be judged with reference to the special public for which they were written.

Now in comparing, for instance, two countries like America and France, one will be struck by this essential difference: in America there is held to be only one general public, while in France this unity does not exist; there is more than one public. It is true that before the Revolution there was only one public for literature, namely, the cultivated public; the mass of the people did not even know how to read or write. But after the Revolution conditions changed; democracy soon created a demand for popular literature and it was supplied. At the same time many authors (Stendhal, Mérimée and others) objected to lowering literature to the level of social democracy, keeping up the traditions of a literature for an intellectual aristocracy. The struggle continued all through the nineteenth century (think of men like Baudelaire, Barbey d'Aurevilly, Flaubert, Leconte de l'Isle, Villiers de l'Isle Adam). Even after the democratic ideals had conquered in political and social life, a strong protest was made against their acceptance in literature, the group of authors known as "Symbolists" proving especially fierce in their attacks against the in-

vasion of the *bourgeois* spirit. Their efforts have not been in vain; as a consequence, there are still in France two literatures: the old, traditional, artistic literature which requires culture on the part of the reader; and popular literature.² Writers are not compelled to strike the unhappy medium of mediocrity and remain within the reach of all classes in order to find readers. They generally choose at the beginning of their careers either to write "up" or "down." A sufficient amount of literature is supplied fitted for the masses (exciting slum stories like de Kock's, fighting stories like "The Three Musketeers," love stories like "L'Abbé Constantin"); and others who approach a subject seriously and treat it thoroughly have another public that understands them:—of course, a rather small public, the truly educated public.

There are a few sporadic cases of authors of the higher type who are read also by the general public, as *e. g.* Zola and Maupassant, whose art in telling stories can be thoroughly enjoyed by people who do not in the least care for, or understand their philosophy, just as the fables of LaFontaine are enjoyed both by children and by the deepest thinkers. Another exceptional case is Victor Hugo; on the one hand his philosophy is commonplace, and on this account he is very popular with the masses while very much despised by professional critics; but on the other hand his admirable mastery of the French tongue wins praise even from the most exacting readers.

If one comes to look at things from this standpoint, and regards the public, not as a kind of neutral entity, but as a living agent which responds to literature and art according to different degrees of culture and intellectual attainment, the whole problem is transformed. The question cannot be settled once for all from a merely theoretical point of view and *sub specie aeternatis*; the truth is that a work of art—novel, drama, painting, etc.—may be considered excellent in one country and bad in another, and may be judged in like manner with reference to two different publics in the same country. The

² I have given a short sketch of the history of this struggle between the two literatures in France since the time of the French Revolution up to our own day in an article in *The Bookman*, November, 1902.

famous words of Pascal: "Vérité en deçà des Pyrénées, erreur au delà" cannot yet be used in a purely ironical sense; they express actual condition.

We are not then surprised at the attitude taken in regard to French literature or to the writings of Bernard Shaw by the majority of moralists in America; they read French authors and judge them bad because their books are not suited for the general American public, especially for the masses. But in France the educated portion of society form a separate circle which allows not only the treatment of topics that would be objectionable for the masses, but a treatment of them from another than the conventional point of view.

When one remembers that nearly all the orthodox views of to-day were once heterodox, it may easily follow that the moral standards held at present will in time give place to others. New conceptions work slowly; but ideas advanced by the educated strata of society gradually filter down to the uneducated. Therefore, in the writer's opinion, an "aristocratie intellectuelle" is necessary, and in the long run will contribute to the general welfare.

The Anglo-Saxons, in trying to keep from the masses ideas which are not easily understood, admit the existence of a sphere of thought above the comprehension of the general public. They thereby concede the value of an independent *élite*. It is remarkable that they pay special attention to the higher literature in France, and write about it in papers and periodicals. But an unexpected result is that in this way, the literature for the *élite* in France is brought before the general public in America—for which it was not intended and is not suitable. Hence the severe judgments, from a moral point of view, which are passed upon products of French literature. Such criticisms would be right only if these works had been meant for the general public.

From what has been said, it appears that really good writers in France, because of their freedom to deal with all subjects—even with those that touch the most questionable social relations, are because of their freedom, in an unusually favorable position as compared with writers of some other countries.

Among American authors, for instance, literary art, to its disadvantage, is confined to narrower limits. But can it be expected that the favorable conditions that prevail in France will continue? French authors have been complaining bitterly in recent years of the forced "democratization" of literature and art—but especially of literature—that is following closely upon the triumph of democracy in social life. Many have gone so far as to deny the blessings of democracy because they see in the modern conceptions of life the doom of their artistic ideals, and they are unwilling to pay that price for social progress. To them there is a real incompatibility between art and democracy. In the writer's opinion, however, these protests are useless; to try and stop the formidable wave of democracy is to build a wall of sand against the tides of the ocean. Renan, who was much concerned with this problem, struck what seems to be the most reasonable attitude. He pointed out how idle was the attempt to oppose the inevitable. He thought that the modern social evolution should be allowed to pursue its course without interference. As for the few incorrigible social dreamers and literary idealists, he said they should try to be content without endeavoring to convert the world to their views. If they would leave the world alone, they would be left alone in their turn, and might be much happier in their solitude than they think.

In this resignation advocated by Renan there is, no doubt, a note of deep pessimism. One may nevertheless take a more hopeful view. Alongside of the growth of democracy, another tendency, directly springing from it, is gaining ground every day, namely, cosmopolitanism, and the effects of this tendency will surely be felt in the higher spheres of life as elsewhere. The educated classes of different countries instead of each remaining almost completely isolated should come into closer relations and understanding and assert their vitality and permanence in the moral leadership of the world. In fact, signs are not lacking which indicate a slow movement in that direction.